

OPINIONS ON SLAVERY.

CLAY Sen. vs. CLAY Jr.

A COLLOQUY

BETWEEN

HON. L. D. CAMPBELL, OF OHIO,

AND

HON. JAMES B. CLAY, OF KY.,

In the House of Representatives of the U. S., March 30, 1858.

Mr. CLAY having concluded his speech "on the admission of Kansas under the Lecompton Constitution,"

Mr. HOUSTON. If no one else wants the floor, I will move that the committee rise.

Mr. CAMPBELL. If the gentleman from Alabama will yield to me for a minute or two I desire just here, at the conclusion of the speech of the gentleman from Kentucky, (Mr. CLAY,) to read an extract from a speech delivered in the Hall of the House of Representatives, in favor of relieving Kentucky from slavery. In speaking of those who complained of the movement, the distinguished orator said:

"What would they who thus reproach us have done? If they would repress all tendencies towards liberty and ultimate *emancipation*, they must do more than put down the benevolent efforts of this society. They must go back to the era of our liberty and independence, and muzzle the cannon which thunders its annual joyous return. They must revive the slave-trade, with all its train of atrocities." * * * "They must blow out the moral lights around us, and extinguish that greatest torch of all which America presents to a benighted world, pointing the way to their rights, their liberties, and their happiness. And when they have achieved all these purposes, their work will be yet incomplete. They must penetrate the human soul, and eradicate the light of reason and the love of liberty. Then, and not till then, when universal darkness and despair prevail, can you perpetuate slavery, and repress all sympathies, and all humane and benevolent efforts among freemen, in behalf of the unhappy portion of our race who are doomed to bondage.

"Our friends who are cursed with this greatest of human evils, deserve the kindest attention and consideration. Their property and their safety are both involved. But the liberal and candid among them will not, cannot, expect that every project to deliver our country from it is to be crushed because of a possible and ideal danger."

The gentleman from Kentucky censures the course which Northern members have seen fit to take in opposition to the extension of slavery into territory now free—into territory north of 36° 30'. The extract I have just read were the sentiments uttered in the Hall of the House of Representatives by the illustrious predecessor of that gentleman who represents the Ashland district of Kentucky. I read the speech when a boy. The distinguished man who made it taught me the very first lesson I ever learned upon this subject of slavery. His name, sir, was HENRY CLAY.

18 July 1991

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Anti-Slavery

Mr. CLAY. Mr. Chairman, if I may be allowed permission, I would reply for a moment or two, to the remarks of the gentleman from Ohio. I did not come into this house to-day, sir, for the purpose of bringing here the speeches of the gentleman from whom I am proud to have descended. The sole purpose with which I alluded to his name was to correct a misstatement, or misrepresentation, or misconstruction, whichever it may have been, of the honorable Senator from my own State, in reference to the so-called Missouri Compromise line of $36^{\circ} 30'$. The position, sir, of Mr. Clay upon the question of negro slavery is well known, and I have no doubt that the gentleman from Ohio has correctly quoted his language. But I will tell you what you will find in the speech delivered by him upon the compromise measures of 1850. You will find that in place of that line of $36^{\circ} 30'$, which he himself believed was no longer operative for the purpose for which it was designed, he gave us another compromise, and that was the very doctrine of non-intervention by Congress upon the subject of slavery. He, sir, in his speech in 1850, said also, as I am willing to admit, that, by his own act, he never would place slavery where slavery was not; but at the same time, and in the same speech, he said that if a new State were to present herself at the door of Congress, asking admission into the Union of States, he, for one, would never oppose her admission because she had chosen to have slavery in her constitution, for in that case slavery would be there by the will of the people themselves, and Congress would be absolved from all agency in placing it there. He believed that the people of this country were capable of self-government, and was willing that they should decide the question for themselves; and when they presented themselves to Congress asking admission with slavery, he would vote to admit them into the Union. That was the position then held. That is the position I am proud to hold, and that is the position in which I am proud to follow him. Sir, talk about the Kansas-Nebraska bill, and the doctrine of non-intervention contained in it, as though it were there to be found for the first time! You find it for the first time in 1850, a substitute, a better thing—that doctrine of non-intervention—than your line of $36^{\circ} 30'$; a better thing than any compromise ever made upon the subject of slavery; at least, so thought the author of the compromise of 1850, and I follow him. I speak by the record when I assert that these were his sentiments.

Mr. CAMPBELL. I had no disposition, when I rose, to enter into any discussion upon this subject. My opinions in regard to slavery are pretty well understood. I did not think the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. CLAY) would become excited over the fact that I dared to quote from the speech of a man to whom I became attached in my early boyhood, and whose banner I followed in political struggles as long as he lived.

Mr. CLAY. If the gentleman will allow me, I will say that if he thought I was excited by his referring to Mr. Clay as he did, then he must attribute it to perhaps an unfortunate manner of mine, and not in the least degree to any excitement which I felt.

Mr. CAMPBELL. I defend the principles of that departed statesman;

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I adopted his position that slavery ought not to be extended into free territory; and it was upon that principle that I opposed, through many days and many nights, the repeal of the Missouri Compromise—a measure which, if Henry Clay did not vote for, he supported throughout the subsequent portion of his life, as one bringing peace and harmony to our then distracted country, which he loved.

In the same speech from which I have read, delivered by him in 1827, he uses this language. I recite from memory:

“Could I relieve of this foul blot [slavery] the revered State which gave me birth, and the no less beloved State which adopted me as her son, I would not exchange the satisfaction I should enjoy from such a triumph, for the proudest laurels ever worn by Roman conqueror.”

It would seem not only that Henry Clay was opposed to the extension of slavery into free territory, but that he was desirous of removing the blot entirely from Virginia, where he was born, and from Kentucky, that had so highly honored him.

The gentleman has referred to the measures of 1850, and to the position which Mr. Clay took then. What was it? He was at the head of a committee of thirteen, appointed by the Senate, and he made an able report in regard to the territories acquired from Mexico. In it he addressed himself to the North to this effect: there is no necessity for applying the Wilmot proviso to this territory, because slavery can never go there; it was excluded by the law of Mexico; California has already adopted a constitution rejecting slavery; in all human probability Utah and New Mexico will do the same.

And following out the suggestions of that report, you may remember that Daniel Webster, in his speech of the 7th of March, so highly lauded throughout the South, said to the Senate, in substance: you ought not to ask the Wilmot proviso, because it is but a human statute applied to a territory over which nature's God has decreed through his laws of climate and soil, that slavery can never go; and why re-enact His statutes?

By the compromise measures of 1850, it must be borne in mind, there was no provision for “squatter sovereignty.” They provided that the people of the Territories of Utah and New Mexico might, when they acquired sufficient population, decide the question of slavery for themselves, and not before they were prepared to form a State Constitution. It was not contended by Mr. Clay, Mr. Webster, or any other leading member of either branch of Congress, of any party, that while they remained in a territorial condition, slavery could enter the Territories of the United States.

Mr. Chairman, I have said all I desire to say at this time.

Mr. CLAY. I regret, and I feel it proper to express my regret, that the name of my father has been brought so frequently into this discussion.

Mr. CAMPBELL. I have referred to it with the most profound respect, and in vindication of my own position as a Representative.

Mr. CLAY. I know it; and I thank the gentleman from Ohio, and I thank all others who were his friends, for having been so. My heart has

always been full of gratitude to them. My sole reason, as I stated in the first instance, in mentioning his name at all, was because it had been mentioned in the Senate Chamber by a gentleman of great distinction, and great influence over this land, and who has been looked upon as his great friend; but who had, unintentionally perhaps, misrepresented him. I had no purpose of going into the question of squatter sovereignty and other questions, which my honorable friend from Ohio has brought up, to show, or to attempt to show, the opinions of Mr. Clay, upon any of those subjects. It was for a single and sole object that I mentioned his name at all.

Always, however, it has been my fate, since first I raised my head above the political waters, and stood out a freeman before the country, to be sought to be crushed in his name. Those attempts have failed, thank God, in my own country, and I hope always, everywhere, to be able to sustain the positions I have taken by his record.

I have not spoken upon any of those subjects of squatter sovereignty, &c., to which the gentleman has alluded; and I shall no longer continue a discussion upon what were not the opinions of Mr. Clay, which I do not think relevant to this debate on Kansas.

Mr. CAMPBELL. I have no disposition to put the gentleman from Kentucky down.

Mr. CLAY. I know it; I know it.

Mr. CAMPBELL. I merely wished to show that I preferred to follow the course of his father, rather than to follow his; that is all.

Mr. CLAY. Very well; very well. We shall see; we shall see.